



SECTION 9
HILLSIDES &
GREENBELT
STRATEGY



INTRODUCTION

The Hillsides and Greenbelt Strategy is a statement of the Plan's desire to maintain the surrounding hillsides and the 3,600-some-odd acres of buffer lands between San José and Morgan Hill in a rural/semi-rural state that is free of urban development.

The Hillsides are some of the most extensive and visually prominent elements of the Coyote landscape, and their preservation is critical for the maintenance of view sheds, valuable watersheds and wildlife habitat. Equally important is the protection of the South Coyote Greenbelt as a buffer between urbanization in San José and Morgan Hill, as well as for its ecological value for potential aquifer recharge, trail and open space accommodations, and habitat protection. In this regard, the Hillside and Greenbelt strategy envisions South Coyote Valley as a "unique, rural place of countywide importance, providing permanent separation between the urban areas of North County and South County."

The inclusion of the hillsides, which are geographically outside the boundaries of the Coyote Valley Plan, underscores the importance of the natural environment

and ecological preservation for the Plan. The CVP reflects the goal of the San José 2020 General Plan for the hillsides to remain permanently rural in character. The Hillside Strategy would be implemented primarily through the purchase of open space by the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority and other entities. The vision for the hillsides surrounding Coyote Valley is thus reflective of the San José 2020 General Plan Greenline/ Urban Growth Boundary Major Strategy. The South Coyote Valley Greenbelt is, however, unique in its setting, existing land uses and natural environment, and therefore merits a tailor-made approach for its future protection and appropriate transformation. Following is a discussion of the history of the Greenbelt, the strategy for implementing the Council's vision for the Greenbelt, and a framework for implementing the strategy.

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GOVERNANCE AND HISTORY OF GREENBELT

The primary goal of the 2020 General Plan for South Coyote Valley is to maintain it as a permanent non-urban buffer between San José and Morgan Hill by designating it as a Greenbelt Overlay. Underlying this Overlay designation are a variety of base land use designations including Agriculture, Public Park/Open Space, Public/Quasi Public, and Private Recreation, which proposed land uses must conform to.

South Coyote Valley has been planned for greenbelt and non-urban uses for over 20 years. It is outside the City of San José's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), which was adopted in 1996 (and later approved in 2000 by the voters).

The City's General Plan specifies that lands outside of the City's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) are intended to remain permanently rural in character and remain under the jurisdiction of the Santa Clara County. Both jurisdictions are committed to the success of this arrangement, and it is reflected in the Greenline/Urban Growth Boundary

goals and policies of both General Plans. The City and the County have a long-standing tradition of cooperative planning and urban growth management since 1970.

About 20% of the Greenbelt is under the jurisdiction of the City of San José, and about 80% is under the County's jurisdiction. The City's General Plan land use designations for the Greenbelt include "Agriculture," "Private Recreation," "Public Park/ Open Space" and "Public/ Quasi Public." The County's General Plan Land Use Map designations for the Greenbelt are "Agriculture-Large

Scale" (40-acre minimum parcel size), "Agriculture-Medium Scale" (20-acre minimum parcel size), "Other Public Lands," "Major Gas and Electric Utilities," "Hillsides," "Roadside Service," "Ranchlands" and "Regional Parks, Existing".

Existing County and City land use regulations generally require a minimum of 20 acres per parcel. Properties located in the County, on the east side of Monterey Road, are designated for large-scale agriculture with a 40-acre minimum lot size requirement.

GREENBELT STRATEGY

The CVP includes a Greenbelt Strategy to implement the City Council's Vision statement to preserve the Greenbelt as a permanent non-urban buffer between the City of San José and the City of Morgan Hill. The Greenbelt area is included in the CVP primarily to determine financing and other mechanisms to secure this area as a permanent Greenbelt.

The City Council's *Vision and Expected Outcomes for the CVP* includes the following Vision Statements regarding the Greenbelt:

- a. The plan would include Central and North Coyote for land planning, and would include South Coyote in the infrastructure financing mechanism only. South Coyote (Greenbelt) is included only to determine the financing and other mechanisms to secure this area as a permanent Greenbelt.
- b. The line (Greenline) between Central and South shall not be moved.
- c. The plan must be financially feasible for private development.

- d. The plan should seek mechanisms to facilitate permanent acquisition of fee title or conservation easements in South Coyote.

The goal is to create a high quality environment in the Greenbelt that includes riparian amenities, trails, natural habitats, open space, and vistas, connections to the hillsides and high quality home sites in the rural setting of Coyote Valley. South Coyote Valley should support and continue Santa Clara County's agricultural heritage by providing opportunities for small-scale agriculture and related activities and by encouraging the preservation and protection of existing agricultural uses.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Greenbelt Strategy includes a framework to create and sustain a rural environment that supports high value rural residential home sites, active open space and related recreation, conservation, and small-scale agriculture.

The findings from the Greenbelt Research Report (Appendix 12), dated June 2005, identified specific economic and environmental challenges and opportunities to meeting this goal which are outlined below:

Economic and Environmental Challenges

Lack of viability for conventional agriculture due to depressed markets, rising costs of inputs (e.g. fuel, pesticides

and fertilizer), unavailability and expenses of labor; regulatory barriers; lack of processing facilities; small parcels and traffic problems for machinery; uncertainty and concern by property owners; limited funding for agricultural easements; high land costs; some marginal soils; septic suitability problems; high nitrate levels in some wells; high groundwater levels and potential for flooding; high number of hazardous materials users; low producing wells; wildlife pests and land use compatibility and liability issues between housing, agriculture and wildlife uses.

Economic and Environmental Opportunities

Aesthetic, agricultural and natural landscape and recreational opportunities could raise home site values and add value to surrounding urban areas; economic and environmental sustainability; multi-functional land use and community health are beneficial for new CVP and Greenbelt uses; increasing demand for locally grown food/products and on-farm educational programs; potential market for locally grown specialty food in greater San José region; Coyote Valley climate, natural resources and proximity to San José regional markets are a plus for future farmers; some existing farms and businesses would like to continue and expand; potential opportunities to focus appropriate wetland and habitat

mitigation requirements in Greenbelt areas; a wildlife corridor in Greenbelt would link regional parks on east and west sides of Coyote Valley; water quality generally good for irrigation and agricultural uses; sufficient water supply and affordability and potential for establishment of new trails along Fisher Creek and augmentation of and connection to existing trail systems and natural habitat areas.

Assumptions and Principles

The Greenbelt Strategy acknowledges the constraints and opportunities as well as the following assumptions and principles:

1. No additional subdivision should be approved unless it is consistent with the County's General Plan designations of 20-acre (Agriculture-Medium Scale) and 40-acre (Agriculture-Large Scale) minimums. Properties in San José would be subject to the 20-acre minimum parcel size requirement of the San José 2020 General Plan.
2. The major economic value of the property is the single-family home site. Open space and agricultural uses in the South Coyote Valley enhance the value of South Coyote Valley home sites.
3. Existing parcels of record are legally recognized, irrespective of size. They may be developed with a house and an additional "granny unit," or other permitted uses if they pass certain pre-requisites conditions for development, including percolation and water supply.
4. While property owners may choose to engage in farming, there is no intention to force agriculture uses. Instead, agriculture uses are encouraged, not required.
5. Existing land uses that were previously approved by the County or City (for annexed properties) may continue even in their present use even if they are not consistent with the current land use regulations. There is no intention to amortize these "legal non-conforming" land uses.
6. The City and County do not have any plans to condemn, any properties in South Coyote Valley.
7. The City would not extend urban services outside the Urban Service Area, or beyond Palm Avenue into the South Coyote Valley Greenbelt area.
8. Existing agricultural uses in the greenbelt should be preserved and potential land use conflicts with new development should be minimized.

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The Greenbelt strategy proposes to establish a framework to create and sustain a rural environment that supports high value rural residential home sites, active open space and related recreation, conservation, and various forms of agriculture, including small-scale agriculture and agro-based industries and related activities. The agricultural uses in the Greenbelt should be an important part of the aesthetic environment supporting high quality residential and open space uses, and a means of maintaining the open space lands and low intensity uses. The Greenbelt Strategy framework consists of four principal elements: Regulatory Framework; Organization/Operations; Financing; and Resource organizations with expertise for Greenbelt Preservation. Each is described briefly below.

Regulatory Framework

1. Development potential should be consistent with existing City or County General Plan land use policies and Zoning regulations.
2. The Strategy should preserve opportunities for the location of a variety of uses and activities, including riparian corridors, trails, recreational facilities, agricultural and open space areas, buffers and potential executive home sites based on existing City and County land use regulations.
3. The Strategy should promote the establishment of design guidelines, landscaping standards, roadway design and other elements that enhance the quality of the rural landscape.
4. To the extent feasible, the Strategy should identify regulatory procedures to facilitate its implementation.

Operational Entity

1. Implementation of the Greenbelt

Strategy should involve the creation of a non-profit organization or quasi-public entity that is proactively involved in a host of activities designed to facilitate and coordinate small scale agriculture, and conserve open space and environmental resources. The entity would encompass a wide range of activities, examples of which are described below.

2. The entity should work with interested property owners to facilitate efficient and sustainable agriculture through coordination of water issues and assistance in establishing Williamson Act contracts to reduce tax burdens.
3. Agriculture should be facilitated by the entity through efforts to match farmers and land through outreach and lease coordination. This effort should be enhanced by soil studies that establish soil suitability for particular crops in specific sub-areas.
4. The entity should actively work on "branding" Coyote Valley produce through marketing and promotion, establishing relationships with restaurants, supporting and coordinating farmers markets, working to establish farm to school food programs, and other initiatives.
5. The entity should work with property owners and public agencies to coordinate appropriate buffering of agricultural activities, and manage the interface between agriculture, open space, recreation and residential activities in the Greenbelt.
6. Implementation of the Greenbelt Strategy requires bringing together multiple outside funding sources (see below), and the judicious application of financial resources. The entity should serve as a proactive fundraiser

and manager of certain ongoing financial sources to accomplish the goals of the Greenbelt.

Financing

A variety of funding sources would be needed to accomplish the Greenbelt Strategy over the long term. Some potential funding sources are described briefly below.

1. Seed money to create the non-profit entity and provide ongoing operational funding should be provided through a levy of some kind on the development planned to occur in the North- and Mid- Coyote.
2. A limited amount of open space, wetlands, agricultural buffer areas, and wildlife habitat should be funded as appropriate mitigation per CEQA for North- and Mid-Coyote development.
3. Funding and protection of buffer areas and key environmental/open space resources should be achieved through partnerships with open space and conservation organizations, such as the Silicon Valley Land Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, and Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, and other entities.
4. Some portion of existing tax levies to support regional open space should be directed to the Coyote Greenbelt.
 - a. Grant funding sources are available for various agricultural and conservation purposes that may be pursued in association with specific projects and activities.
5. Agricultural management services provided by the entity should be funded in part through fees paid by owners of the agricultural properties under management.

OPERATIONAL ENTITIES



6. Implementation Mechanisms: These measures should generally include the leveraging of available money from various sources. Specific approaches should include:

- a.** Habitat and hydrological recharge and opportunities for dual use.
- b.** Other agency funding to implement their mandates (e.g. trails, open space, etc.)
- c.** "Seed money" for landscape, open space and other right-of-way enhancements, possible support for land management entity.

7. Timing: The Greenbelt Strategy is intended to be a long-term plan to be implemented over 30-40 years.

Resource Agencies

There are a variety of funding sources available which include:

1. Research and Farmer Education Institutions

- a.** University of California Cooperative Extension, Santa Clara County Office, San José
- b.** United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education
- c.** University of California Small Farm Center (Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources), Davis

2. Organic and Small Farm Marketing Programs

- a.** California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)

- b.** California Organic Program, Sacramento (COP)

- c.** Certified Farmers' Market Program, Sacramento (CDFA)

3. Small Farm Advocacy and Education

- a.** Ecological Farming Association, Watsonville

4. Farm Succession and Farmer Training

- a.** California FarmLink
- b.** Agriculture and Land-Based Training Program, Salinas

5. Land Trusts

- a.** Silicon Valley Land Trust